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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority
theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2008/1.



Statement

1. Successful social development would seem to imply the growth of individuals and groups to enable them to live productive lives, and fulfil their total human potential. Crime and violence would seem to be the opposite. Crime and violence have many causes, but we suggest that some of the common root causes are the absence or failures in social development. We suggest, further, that inadequate economic development likewise may have roots in the absence or failures in social development. Moreover, as most incarcerated persons are eventually released back into society, failure to remedy the root causes of these deficiencies in social development during incarceration propagates crime and violence still further.

Who are the prisoners?

2. It is instructive to examine the prisons of the world and their inhabitants. Who are the incarcerated? A high percentage of persons incarcerated are the poor, those with the least education, with the least job skills, and coming from marginalized racial and ethnic minority communities. Many of them have also been afflicted with family dysfunction, learning disabilities, mental or psychological illness, addiction, or other social handicaps. These are large captive populations, running into many millions of persons, stemming from a dominant philosophy of punishment and repression of violators of laws. Counting the costs of police, courts, detention facilities, and after-effects, the financial burden to the world runs into hundreds of billions of dollars each year. Are we on the right track? Are we addressing root causes?

Examples of rehabilitation programmes

3. Our prisons can be promoters of either anti-social development or restorative social development. First let's consider the latter. Economic self-sufficiency of those released from prison is usually an obvious prerequisite to reducing crime and subsequent government expense. Central to the dignity of every human person is engagement in work that reinforces that dignity and makes it possible for the worker to engage with others in shaping the life of the community. Therefore, job-oriented training is a first foundation of any solution to this problem. Corrective social development often must also include alcohol or drug treatment, remedial education, life skills development, and physical, psychological, or mental health treatments or counselling. The needs of the incarcerated for restorative approaches are too often ignored. Nevertheless, some very good rehabilitation and re-entry programmes exist in many countries, as illustrated in the following examples.

4. One Central American country provides its incarcerated persons with a life skills training programme, as well as agriculture classes, computer programming classes and parenting skills classes. A South American country supports volunteers teaching inmates accounting and how to start small businesses. In another country, after learning how to read and write, incarcerated persons are given at least 40 hours of instruction in basic management, total quality management, and other business techniques. In a North American country, a community-based organization provides formerly incarcerated persons with alcohol and drug treatment services, halfway houses and supportive living, vocational job training in culinary arts, motel and restaurant operations, building maintenance and computer applications, job placement, job retention and job coaching services. These and many other examples of rehabilitation programmes in prisons can and should be replicated. Education, job training, addiction treatment, and health caring are proven methods for reducing recidivism, and thus improving everyone's quality of life.

Examples of abuses

5. On the other hand, there are very many examples of abuse and lack of social development in criminal justice systems. In one South American country, for example, major problems include insufficient food, overcrowding, the lack of medical services, and a lack of sanitation and hygienic facilities. In a North American country, the HIV/AIDS rate is six times higher in State and federal prisons than it is in the general population, and the hepatitis infection rate is 9-10 times higher in the prison population than that of the general public.

In many prisons, as crowding has increased, so has prison violence - with physical abuse, gang domination, rapes, and riots increasingly common. Narcotics trafficking, prostitution rings, and other criminal enterprises are prevalent in too many prisons.

Clearly, the problems are great, but so are the opportunities for further development of these large captive populations.

A new era of promise

6. Overemphasis on a primarily punishment-and-suppression policy, with too little spent on social and economic development, results in over-incarceration, delayed judicial processing, over-crowding, a high recidivism rate with further crime and violence, and increasing costs amounting to hundreds of billions of misspent dollars each year.

It need not be so. There is widespread awareness that alternative, more restorative approaches can yield better results at lower cost.

Some specific steps to restructure criminal justice towards a more restorative justice, aimed at social and economic development, include the following:

7. Recommendations

1. Promote social and economic development approaches to the seedbeds of crime and violence in neighbourhoods with very high unemployment, dilapidated housing, poor health services, poor schools, broken families, and a prevalence of addiction.
2. Expand alternatives to incarceration, for both punishment and healing, especially for addicted and mentally ill persons. Use incarceration only when necessary. Avoid excessive sentences.
3. Invest in rehabilitation programmes that develop marketable job skills. Emphasize employability for decent work and a decent living.
4. Prevent overcrowding of prisons; and provide standard sanitary facilities in all correctional institutions.
5. Ensure humane treatment of all incarcerated persons, in keeping with the dignity of every human person.
6. Provide timely medical service for the incarcerated; test for and treat infectious diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis.
7. Whenever appropriate, provide quality treatment for drug addiction, instead of incarceration. Support both in-prison and post-prison treatment for alcohol and drug addictions.
8. Ensure proper treatment or counselling for those who are mentally or psychologically ill.
9. Provide rehabilitation and re-entry planning for each individual, beginning during the first days of incarceration. Fund programmes to fulfil those plans, to enable restorative services both during incarceration and after release.
10. Help incarcerated persons to maintain contact with family and friends through supportive policies concerning visitation, mail and telephones.

In this way, crime and violence can be addressed. The issue is what works best and where the best investment is. We believe that an increased blend of social and economic development - before, during, and after incarceration, instead of only punishment and repression measures - can better restore millions of persons to more productive lives and save billions of dollars each year in the process.

Note:

Statement endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Dominican Leadership Conference and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.
